

PART 2

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Welcome back. For this next session, we continue where we left off. We will spend this time together now to reflect on real and practical terms—how will you and your community identify and begin to animate the dreams that God has planted on and in your heart.

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We revisit Pope Francis' quote, shared at the end of the first session. Pope Francis says, "Time belongs to the Lord. Trusting in Him, we move forward with courage, building unity through discernment, to discover and implement God's dream for us, and the paths of action ahead."

So how do we move forward...

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You are invited to dream of who God is calling you to be and what God is calling you, through your work in the Association, to do.

One way of exploring this is to turn to Mary, our Mother. I often reflect on Mary, pregnant with child. So young, she must have been so confused, so afraid. Could the words of the angel, "Be not afraid," really have calmed her fear?

There was someone waiting to be born. That someone was Jesus, our Savior.

From Mary's yes, God found a cooperating instrument to love.

So, I ask you my friends, what is waiting to be born within you? What has been stirring for some time now.... are you ready to say yes?

Recall the words of the Holy Father, "we can slide backward, or we can create something new."

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Vincentian priest, Fr. Santiago Barquin, in 2002, wrote an article, titled, "The Liberation of the Poor: The Vincentian Rule to Make the Gospel of Jesus Christ Effective." This image is featured with the article on the FamVin website.

This impressive article offers great insights, but I would like to highlight three points that help guide you as you identify and animate your dreams.

Point 1: Practical Action.

Fr. Barquin writes: “Vincent de Paul was a man of action and never formulated some theory. Like Jesus, Vincent dedicated his life to doing and acting, to engaging in various activities to resolve the concrete, painful situations of the poor men and women of his era.”

We, through the work of the Association, are called to do the same. These dreams are not just uplifting exercises. They are meant to respond to the needs of the wounded.

Point 2: Using your gifts and talents.

Fr. Barquin writes, “Vincent was able to make good use of his organizational and creative talents as he engaged in activity to save the poor country people from misery.”

As you dream, secure that your organizational and creative talents, both individually and collectively, are being utilized.

Point 3: We reveal God’s love.

One more time, Fr. Barquin writes, “Through their direct charitable activity on behalf of those persons most in need, Vincent de Paul and the institutions that he established evangelized the people of France and brought about a resurgence of hope among the poor. Indeed, the poor, in the very depth of their being, felt that the God of Jesus Christ had not abandoned them or forgotten them.”

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To review, as you identify and eventually animate your dreams for your Association, secure that the dreams meet these three criteria:

1. They are practical.

In other words, it is realistic. I am reminded of the words of St Francis of Assisi: “Start by doing what is necessary, then do what is possible, suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

2. They incorporate your unique gifts and talents. Like a mosaic, each member of your Association is there for a reason- including you. The Holy Spirit has brought you together for a reason. As generations of Vincentian communities came together to respond to the needs of the poor, so must we.

3. Finally, the third requirement is that your dreams reveal God’s love- especially to the poor. Those who are wounded, abandoned, suffering will experience the love of God by your generous care and action.

In addition, we pray that others, those suffering less, will be moved by your witness. Like what was said of the persecuted early Christians, “see how they love one another.” It is this love that has exuded from the Vincentian family, inviting countless others to walk in this charism to transform hearts and heal wounds. It has brought us all here today under the love of our Mother and her Son.

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I would like to give you an example.

Several years ago, I ran a youth ministry program. We agreed that we needed an event to unite the parish and to make a difference. We brought together the youth and young adults of our parish and brainstormed ideas. Every idea was written down, as all had a chance to speak. Then, we reviewed all the ideas, and soon one idea emerged. We would raise funds for children battling cancer and for research to find a cure. Many of us lost loved ones to cancer and a child in the parish also was impacted.

How would we do this?

In 1999, there were three successful businessmen who wanted to share their fortune with those in need. One of those men was a member of our Vincentian family, an alum of St. John’s University. They thought of an idea to shave their heads and to ask for donations to benefit those suffering from childhood cancer. The organization was called, St. Baldricks. It was named after a fictional saint that drew attention to this new cause.

Their first event, held at a St Patrick’s Day party in 2000 in New York City, shaved 19 heads and raised \$104,000.00 American dollars. Their goal was \$17,000.00.

Within two years, they raised over a million dollars. Twenty-two years later, they have held countless events and raised hundreds of millions of dollars. For one example, since 2005, they raised over \$314 million dollars. In 2015, the research supported by the foundation, a new drug was approved that drastically improves the cure rate for high-risk individuals.

I think of the words of Jesus, “when two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them (Matt 18:19).” These three men, committed to doing something for others, found a creative way to bring communities together and to transform lives.

Returning to my youth ministry program, we held our first St Baldrick’s event that following spring. For the first time in the parish’s history, there was a youth-run event that involved all organizations and parish members. The Church Hall was full after the 1030am Mass to cheer on the young and

old who shaved their heads. Over 30 heads were shaved, with the youngest being 5 and the oldest being 80. Another 20 individually cut more than 6 feet of their hair to create wigs for those who lost their hair to cancer treatment.

Over \$25,000.00 was raised to benefit research and to help impacted families with medical bills. This became a new parish tradition and it all started with a dream and a community committed to making a difference.

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I would like to briefly address accountability to one another. It is very easy to leave an assembly such as this and feel empowered and inspired to try something new, to make something happen to transform lives.

Then life continues, demands are made, and this becomes a nice but ineffective exercise. One of your follow-up questions will address this- how will you hold yourself and one another accountable?

We must also look to ourselves for responsibility. There is no place for excuses. Vincent de Paul did a great deal with very little money. He was creative, he depended on others, and he reminded his communities as he reminds us today that the poor are depending on us. Your dreams are not for the leadership of the International Miraculous Medal Association to solve. You are called to animate these dreams.

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We must also ask those we serve what they need. Otherwise, these efforts can easily become self-serving vanity projects. Ask those you wish to help how you can best help them. Then, invite them to serve with you. This is so much a part of our Vincentian charism. It is the only way to begin to move from charity to justice, as systems can begin to shift as well as hearts.

So, for whatever is desired today, please remember to ask those you hope to serve that their needs are being met. Remain open and flexible as they reveal their experiences. Open ears and hearts are required. The idea you have today may shift completely- and that is ok. The Holy Spirit moves through us. We just need to cooperate.

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I would like to conclude with one final quote and one more song. They both come from the Focolare community. As mentioned earlier, the Focolare and the Vincentian Family have worked closely together recently, especially through the talents and musical messages of Gen Verde. The Focolare community was founded by Chiara Lubich as her community was being destroyed by the bombs of World War II.

Chiara speaks these words: “Our City is being bombarded constantly, if we die tonight, what will we bring to God? We want to tell him we did the one and only thing he asked of us- that we loved one another.”

My friends, how are you as an Association loving one another?

How are you as a community inspired by and dedicated to the message of the Miraculous Medal, loving those most in need?

How are you loving God, by the utilization of your gifts and talents as well as by your trust in the movement of the Holy Spirit.

I pray that you, and I, when we return to God, will be able to say that we, too, loved one another.

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Before we conclude and you have time to meet together to reflect further, I invite Gen Verde back to perform a song created for the Vincentian family. It is called, “Vincent’s Song- you did it to me.”

Lyrics:

I see a wounded traveler
Left with only shattered dreams
Lying on the roadside
Calling quietly to me
I look beyond the surface
Lord, I catch a glimpse of you
All alone and helpless
Tell me Lord: What would you do?
Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh
I'll be your hands, I'll be your smile
Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh
'Cause you'll be with me all the while
I know you need me here today
Lord I'll keep searching for your face
I can see you now
I can see you now
I want to bring your love again
Prisoners of hunger, cold and pain
Children of every creed and race
How could I ever walk away?
'Cause I can hear you say:
You did it to me
You did it to me
You did it to me, to me

Lord, we stand before you
Come and touch our ears and eyes
So, to love more deeply
And like you, to give our lives
May we bring your Spirit
May your people come alive
As we walk together
Come and set our hearts on fire

Amar a todos, amarlos con tu corazón
We'll be your heart, we'll be your song

Seremos eco de tu voz
So let the whole world sing along

Busco tu rostro entorno a mí
En los que no sienten tu amor
Yo te puedo ver
Yo en ti puedo ser
Amor que hace renacer
Hambre y dolor son su prisión
Su hogar la desesperación
En ellos tú me necesitas
En ellos yo te encuentro

I know you need me here today
You did it to me
You did it to me
I can see you now
I can be you now
You did it to me
You did it to me
I know you need me here today
Lord I'll keep searching for your face

How could I ever walk away?
'Cause I can hear you say:
You did it to me
You did it to me
You did it to me, to me (me lo haces a mí)
You did it to me
You did it to me
You did it to me, to me

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As this session ends, you will again reflect on this time spent together.
Your first question is

What are your dreams as an Association to transform your community
(respond first individually and then, in time, decide as a community)?

Then, after you name these dreams, How will you hold yourself and one
another accountable?

I remind you to return to the 3 criteria that I highlighted earlier for your
dreams:

That they are practical, that they incorporate your unique and collective
gifts and talents, and that they reveal God's love to the poor.

I also remind you that when you return to your community, ask those who
you wish to serve how to best serve them, and to invite them to serve with
you.

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One final note before we conclude. Here is my contact information. I work
with communities to identify dreams and to animate them to transform
lives and communities. If I can be of any help to you, please reach out.

I also share my first book, Dreams Come True: Discovering God's Vision
for Your Life. This book offers more activities and questions to help you
better identify your dreams and a process to implement them.

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you- it truly was a great gift for
me and my spirit.